

The Little Turkeys

by Clara Murray

IN SCHOOL

The “little Turkeys” that I am going to tell you about are the children that live in a far away land called Turkey.

To reach this land you would have to travel many hundreds of miles in railroad trains and big ships.

In fact it is almost as far away as China, and that, you know, is farther away than you can imagine.

The “little Turkeys” are very interesting, and they would think your way of living just as strange as you will think theirs is.

To begin at the very beginning, the tiny baby doesn’t wear any dresses. He is wrapped round and round, body, legs, and arms, with cloths, until he looks like a dry-goods bundle.

Every baby wears a gay little bonnet, usually bright green, because the favorite color of the Turks is green.

The Turkish baby is often hung up in a little cloth hammock, but sometimes he is rocked to sleep in a wooden cradle.

The cradle is a long wooden box on low rockers with high carved ends.

In the Sultan’s treasure house is a cradle of solid gold, decorated with pearls, diamonds, and rubies. This is the cradle in which the baby princes are rocked; and it is very beautiful, as you can easily imagine.

When the boy baby is about a year old he is placed in charge of a man nurse, if the father is not too poor. This man takes care of him until he is six years old.

Then the boy is given a new suit of clothes and a pony, and he is ready to go to school. Almost all of the boys in Turkey ride on horse-back. I think you would like that.

The new suit may be big baggy trousers, with an embroidered shirt and short jacket. Or it may be long full trousers of gay striped calico, and a little jacket, quilted in puffy squares.

Every boy wears on his head a red fez with a black tassel.

In his new suit, the boy starts off for school on his pony, and his brothers go with him. The bells on the pony jingle, the boys shout and sing, and it is a very merry procession.

The schoolhouse stands near the church. Inside, it is very plain. There is a blackboard hung

from the ceiling, a shelf for books and slates, and one for a water jar.

There is a little shelf for the teacher's pipe, and a place where he makes coffee over a tiny lamp. For the teacher smokes and sips coffee while the children study their lessons.

The children sit cross-legged on mats on the floor, and study out loud, bending their bodies back and forth all the time. Perhaps they think this helps them to remember.

They learn their letters, and very queer letters you would think them, out of the Koran. They have no other book until they know this one by heart, and can repeat it and write it.

Then they learn a little arithmetic and a very little geography.

In olden times the girls did not go to school at all, but stayed at home learning to keep house, sew, and embroider. They were also taught to weave cloth and to make beautiful rugs.

Now there are many schools for girls, as well as high schools and colleges for both girls and boys.

The noise of the studying is stopped once during the day. At noon the time for prayer is called out from the tower of the church. Then all is quiet for a few minutes while teacher and pupils kneel to say the midday prayer.

Then the candy-man appears with all sorts of sweets on trays. The candies are called "Turkish delights." They are "pasty, creamy, crackly things, made from rose-leaves, violets, nuts, dates and grapes, mixed with honey, sugar, syrup and spices."

Doesn't that sound good enough to eat?

AT HOME

Little boys who like to lie in bed in the morning would not like to live in Turkey.

All the grown people and all the children have to get up twice every day.

They get up first at day-break, wash their faces and hands, and repeat their morning prayer. Then they go back to bed.

Two hours later they rise, wash, and have their coffee. Breakfast is served two hours later still.

After breakfast the father goes to work and the mother gets the children ready for school.

The children have their lunch at school, as I told you. Dinner is served at night. If there are gentlemen to dine with the father, only the sons sit at the table. The mother and daughters dine in another room.

After dinner every one has a good time. The children play games, and sometimes the older people play with them. They are also fond of story telling, and tell wonderful stories of battle and adventure.

Then the family goes to bed on the floor. That is, they lay mattresses on the floor and cover themselves with blankets.

Every one goes to church on Friday. The boys sit with their father, and the girls sit with their mother in a gallery where they cannot be seen. At the entrance to the church they wash their hands and feet and put on a pair of slippers.

After church the children play games of tag, or hide-and-seek. They have few toys. The girls have dolls, and the boys have marbles or balls. The marbles are nothing but a kind of round nut.

They do not have the holidays you do, but there are a few feast days, when they have a very good time. One of the feasts is like our Easter, only it lasts three days. Then there are merry-go-rounds in the squares, and ponies to ride on for a penny.

The girls have new dresses of red, blue and yellow silk, and the boys have gay little uniforms.

The candy-men walk the streets with big trays piled high with sweets, and every one eats a great deal too much candy.

Should you like to live in Turkey, or do you like your own country best?

Source:

Murray, Clara. "The Little Turkeys." *The Wide Awake Third Reader*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1912. 83 – 90. Electronic.